

# **Community Action Plan for Seismic Safety (CAPSS)**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is CAPSS?**

The Community Action Plan for Seismic Safety (CAPSS) is a program of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection. The CAPSS project was initiated to identify ways to reduce the damage that earthquakes cause and facilitate San Francisco's post-earthquake recovery.

### **What is the goal of the CAPSS project?**

The CAPSS project will provide the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection with an action plan to reduce earthquake risks. This plan will propose ways to prevent damage in existing buildings regulated by the Department of Building Inspection and to improve post-earthquake repair guidelines to expedite recovery.

### **Who manages the CAPSS project?**

The CAPSS project is managed by The Applied Technology Council (ATC) under contract with the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection. As a community effort, the CAPSS project is guided by a volunteer Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from a number of neighborhood and community groups, earthquake specialists, and the City of San Francisco.

### **Why is the CAPSS project focused on “soft” story buildings?**

In July 2008, Mayor Gavin Newsom issued an Executive Directive asking that CAPSS focus first on ways to reduce risk in wood frame buildings with “soft” or weak first stories. This building type experienced some dramatic collapses in the Marina neighborhood during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. Thousands of similar buildings throughout the city could be damaged by a larger or closer earthquake. By the end of January 2009, the project will identify policies to make these buildings safer. In 2009 and 2010, the project will make recommendations for addressing the risk of other potentially dangerous types of buildings.

### **What is a “soft” story building?**

“Soft” story buildings are buildings where the ground floor is significantly weaker and more flexible than the stories above. During an earthquake, the ground floor may not be able to support the weight of the upper floors moving back and forth, which can lead to collapse. These are frequently older, wood-frame buildings with garages, stores, restaurants, or other open areas on the ground floor. Several buildings of this type experienced major structural failures in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. The CAPSS project is identifying how many of these buildings exist in San Francisco, which neighborhoods they are in, what level of damage they may experience in future earthquakes, and the costs and safety gains of seismically strengthening them.

**How will the CAPSS project benefit San Francisco residents?**

The CAPSS project will help city residents and leaders better understand the likely consequences of future earthquakes. The project will recommend policies to reduce damage to privately-owned buildings and will clarify the costs, benefits and trade-offs involved in making various policy choices. The project will also develop new guidelines to simplify and clarify post-earthquake building repairs. All of these activities will ensure San Francisco can pick up the pieces and get back to business quickly after an earthquake.

**Will CAPSS require building owners to retrofit?**

No. The CAPSS project will provide the Department of Building Inspection recommendations on policies and programs to reduce the earthquake risk of privately-owned buildings. The project may recommend that owners of certain types of highly vulnerable buildings be required to conduct engineering evaluations or retrofits. The Department of Building Inspection, Building Inspection Commission, Mayor and Board of Supervisors will decide whether these recommendations should be enacted.

**How will the CAPSS project assist building owners?**

The CAPSS project will assist building owners in identifying and preventing earthquake damage to their buildings. The project will make recommendations to the Department of Building Inspection of policies that will improve the seismic safety of the most vulnerable building types. Some of these recommended policies may require building owners to take actions, such as having an engineer evaluate or seismically retrofit their building. The project will also develop new guidelines for how building owners should repair damaged buildings after an earthquake. These new guidelines are expected to clarify requirements for building owners. It will be up to the Department of Building Inspection, Building Inspection Commission, Mayor and Board of Supervisors to decide whether the recommendations and guidelines produced by CAPSS should be enacted.

**When will the CAPSS recommendations be available?**

The Community Action Plan for Seismic Safety (CAPSS) is scheduled to release policy recommendations for wood frame buildings with “soft” or weak first stories in January 2009. Following these recommendations, the project will focus on analyzing other building types in San Francisco and ways to reduce their damage in future earthquakes. Recommendations for reducing risk in other building types and improved guidelines for post-earthquake repair and rebuilding are slated for completion by June 2010.

**Who will decide when the recommendations will be implemented?**

The recommendations of the CAPSS project will be provided to the Department of Building Inspection. Final policy and guideline implementation must be approved by the Department of Building Inspection, Building Inspection Commission, Mayor and Board of Supervisors.

**How can I keep informed about CAPSS activities?**

CAPSS provides an electronic newsletter to San Francisco residents and community organizations interested in receiving updates on the project. To receive this newsletter, please email [newsletter@sfcapps.org](mailto:newsletter@sfcapps.org) or visit our website at [www.sfcapps.org](http://www.sfcapps.org).

**What if I have questions about the CAPSS project?**

Questions or comments about the CAPSS project can be emailed to [info@sfcapps.org](mailto:info@sfcapps.org).